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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to discover what attitudes are held by upper division students regarding an open admissions policy for entering freshmen when they themselves were admitted under rigorous standards. Five large institutions were used for the study: 2 CUNY schools that had recently adopted an open admissions policy; Central U., a residential institution where any graduate of a high school within the State was eligible to enroll; and Midwest U. and Western U. where most freshmen admitted had been in the top 10-15% of their high school graduating class. Results varied among the students surveyed. It was found that students at Central U. held a much more positive attitude toward open admissions than students at other schools. The students at elitest schools tended to hold a negative attitude along with those who had achieved high grades at the CUNY schools. Also, students from affluent backgrounds were more likely to feel that open admissions would lower the value of a degree. Black students and women tended to view open admissions positively. (HS)

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Open Admissions and The College Environment[1]

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There can be little doubt that interaction with peers is a significant part of the environment for most college students. After their extensive review of the research literature related to college impact Feldman and Newcomb[2] concluded that "students perform a necessary function as socializers of one another" (p.331). And clearly the nature of that socialization process is likely to be influenced by the types of students who enroll at a particular college or university.

Thus, when a college significantly changes its admissions policy it is likely that the student environment will be affected. And it might be predicted that the attitudes of upperclass students who had been admitted to the college under the previous more rigorous admissions standards will comprise a significant part of the environment for the students admitted under the new policy.

Open Admissions at CUNY

The concept of open admissions, admitting to a given college all high school graduates who apply, is not new to American higher education. Many, if not most, land grant institutions were founded as open door institutions. But various pressures subsequently led most four-year colleges away from open admissions.

Thus, a significant stir was created in the higher education community when the City University of New York announced, in the summer of 1969, that it

HE 002 963

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[1]A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 8, 1972.

[2]Kenneth A. Feldman and Theodore M. Newcomb. The Impact of College on Students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969.

would implement an open admissions policy in the fall of 1970. Under the new policy, all New York City high school graduates were assured of enrollment at one of the 8 four-year or 7 two-year CUNY colleges. Students with high school averages of 80 or above or who were in the top half of their high school graduating class were eligible to enroll at a four-year college if they chose to do so. Other students were assured enrollment in a two-year college.

Although the new policy stopped short of completely open admission to CUNY's four-year colleges, it markedly changed the admissions patterns at most of the colleges and approximately 8,000 students who would previously have been denied admission to the City University were among the 30,000 freshmen who enrolled at CUNY in the fall of 1970.

During the year prior to the introduction of open admissions, the American Council on Education was invited by the City University of New York to assist with an assessment of the first year of open admissions. Some early descriptive data growing out of the extensive data collected for that project have been presented elsewhere* and the first year impact data are currently being analyzed. The present study, however, while complementary to that project is based upon data collected for the American Council on Education's Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) and includes non-CUNY institutions. This study tries to answer the question, "Among institutions of similar size and type, to what extent are attitudes of seniors towards the concept of open admissions influenced by the institution's admissions policy?"

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*Rossmann, J., "Faculty and Administration Responses to Open Admissions at the City University of New York"

Hall, E., "Attitudes of City University of New York Students Towards Open Admissions"

El-Khawas, E., "Characteristics of Freshmen Students at the City University of New York"

Papers presented at a symposium on open admissions at the American Psychological Association meeting, September 3, 1971.

Method

In the summer of 1971, a sample of students who had completed the American Council on Education's Student Information Form (SIF) in the fall of 1967 were asked to complete a followup questionnaire which included several attitudinal items related to open admissions. Approximately 60,000 students were followed up, with a maximum of 275-325 students selected from the larger institutions in the CIRP. Among the schools at which the 1967 SIF and 1971 followup questionnaire were administered were two of the eight four-year CUNY campuses (CUNY-A and CUNY-B). For this study, three other large public Ph.D. granting institutions were chosen. At Central U., a predominantly residential institution, any graduate of a high school within the state was eligible to enroll. Most freshmen admitted to Midwest U., and Western U., on the other hand, were in the top 10-15% of their high school graduating classes. Midwest U. was also a residential institution, whereas Western U. was largely a commuter campus.

Thus, the five institutions in this study were two CUNY campuses, both of which had held fairly strict admissions standards in 1967 but had moved markedly toward open admissions by the 1970-71 academic year; a midwestern institution (Central U.) which held an open admissions policy throughout the years 1967-71 and a midwestern and west coast institution which held high admissions standards throughout the four-year period. Table 1 presents data describing the sample of institutions and students in the study. Except for the first item, which was based upon a sample of all entering freshmen at the institutions, all data were based upon the responses of the sample of seniors. Percentage of response to the 1971 followup questionnaire ranged from 50% at CUNY-B to 63% at Midwest U.

Findings

Data from those respondents in 1971, who had enrolled at one of the above five institutions in 1967 and had received a B.A. degree by the summer of 1971 or were planning to continue full-time the following fall, were analyzed to

assess their attitudes toward the concept of open admissions. The percentage of respondents saying they agreed with each of seven statements is reported in Table 2. The students were actually asked to respond to each item along a 4-point continuum (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree); the agree and strongly agree responses have been combined in Table 2.

These data make it clear that there were some fairly large differences among seniors at the five campuses in the way they perceived open admissions. In responding to most items, seniors at Central U. (an open admissions institution) viewed the concept of open admissions more positively (or less negatively) than seniors at the other schools. Since these differences may, however, simply have been reflections of initial differences as freshmen, it was decided to examine the data further using a step-wise multiple regression analysis.

An item from the 1967 SIF ("Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions.") was used as a proxie for attitude toward open admissions held at college entrance and was forced to enter the regression equation as the first variable. All other independent variables were allowed to enter freely. These independent variables included attendance at each of the five colleges; sex; race; high school grades; college grades; level of educational aspiration; and level of family income. A .05 level of significance was adopted for F value entry.

The seven open admissions attitudinal items from the followup questionnaire were treated as separate dependent variables, and the results of these seven regression analyses are presented in Tables 3-9. The dependent variables were coded on a 1-4 basis with 4 indicating strong agreement with an item.

These data indicate that even after controlling on initial attitudes toward open admissions and in relationship to certain student background and achievement variables, the type of admissions policy at the college attended

functioned as a significant predictor of senior year attitudes toward open admissions. Attendance at Central U., an open admissions institution, entered five of the seven regression equations as a predictor of positive attitudes toward open admissions.

Having attended either of the two elitist institutions, Midwest U. and Western U., was a significant predictor of negative attitudes toward open admissions in two of the seven analyses. There was little commonality, however, in the ways in which attendance at the two CUNY schools entered the equations. CUNY-A entered three equations significantly and in directions supportive of open admissions. CUNY-B attendance entered only two equations and one of those was in a direction negative to the concept of open admissions.

Among the other independent variables, three variables entered three equations significantly. Having high grades in high school was related to negative attitudes toward open admissions and black students tended to view open admissions positively, as did women.

Level of family income and college GPA both entered one of the equations. Students from affluent backgrounds were more likely to feel that open admissions would lower the value of a degree, and students with high GPA's were less likely to support the idea of having low achieving high school students attend separate colleges. Level of educational aspiration entered none of the seven analyses significantly.

Discussion

What implications can be drawn from these data in trying to better understand the impact of open admissions on the college environment? Two alternative hypotheses might have been plausible before the data were analyzed. On the one hand, it might have been argued that students who persist for four years at an open admissions institution are likely to feel that they and their institution would be better off if the "weeding-out process" among their former student

peers occurred before rather than after college entrance. On the other hand, it could have been argued that seniors in an open admissions institution, becuase they themselves or some of their friends may have benefited from an open admissions policy (as well as for a variety of other reasons), they would be more likely to view open admissions positively than would their peers in more selective institutions. It is clearly the latter hypothesis which receives support from these data.

The data from the two CUNY institutions are perhaps understandably ambivalent. These student respondents were enrolled at campuses of the City University of New York during a period of great turmoil and rhetoric (both pro and con) surrounding the issue of open admissions. It is not surprising then that there are differential attitudes between the two campuses and that attendance at neither campus emerges as a strong predictor of positive attitudes toward open admissions. It is likely, however, that as CUNY's experience with open admissions increases (and is reasonably positive), the attitudes of CUNY's upperclass students will more closely resemble those of Central U.

While it should be noted that all of the regression analyses leave more than 80% of the variance unaccounted for, and replication of the analyses with larger N's is called for, these data do suggest that a university's admissions policy influences not only the kind of student admitted to a given institution, but the attitudes which those students hold as seniors toward the admission of students yet to come. These findings should prove useful to those decision makers and planners who are trying to understand the various implications and outcomes of alternatives to current admissions policies.

Table 1

Descriptive Data For Five Campuses

Number of Seniors in Sample	CUNY-A N=182	CUNY-B N=107	Midwest-A N=157	Midwest-B N=191	Western U. N=149
Percentage of all 1967 entering freshmen with high school averages of B or better	94%	89%	53%	94%	95%
Percentage of 1967 freshmen receiving B.A. within 4 years	46	37	44	63	58
Percentage of 1971 seniors with high school averages of B or better	95	91	66	97	96
Percentage of seniors with cumulative college GPA's of B or above	64	49	55	75	78
Percentage of seniors aspiring to go beyond the B.A. degree	80	54	55	77	74
Percentage of male seniors	72	79	53	55	53
Percentage of seniors reporting family income of less than $10,000 (as freshmen)	62	64	40	25	26
Percentage of Caucasian seniors	88	91	94	95	84

Table 2

Attitudes of College Seniors
Toward Open Admissions

Item	Percentage Agreeing With Statement				
	CUNY-A N=182	CUNY-B N=107	Midwest-A N=157	Midwest-B N=191	Western U. N=149
Open admissions (admitting anyone who applies) should be adopted by all publicly-supported colleges	47%	35%	52%	24%	24%
Even if it employs open admissions, a college should award degrees based on the same performance standards for all students	95	94	87	80	89
Open admissions is a good idea because it equalizes opportunities for higher education	72	57	69	43	48
Open admissions is okay, but the students who have high school deficiencies or poor marks should attend separate colleges	48	45	25	32	40
Open admissions is a good idea because it offers many students a chance	82	79	84	65	67
Open admissions lowers the value of a degree	55	65	28	51	51
Open admissions lowers the reputation of a college	57	64	39	63	63
Open admissions discourages applications from outstanding high school graduates	58	60	38	46	43

Table 3

Dependent Variable - Open admissions (admitting anyone who applies) should be adopted by all publicly-supported colleges.

Independent Variables	Multiple R	Zero-order r	Direction and Significance Level in Final Multiple Regression Equation: Sign	F - Ratio
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions-1967	.22	.22	+	69.57*
Attending Central U.	.32	.22	+	61.23
Attending CUNY-A	.39	.12	+	48.99
Attending CUNY-B	.40	-.04	+	8.24
High school grades	.41	-.18	-	7.91

*F ≥ 3.84 = P < .05
F ≥ 6.64 = P < .01
F ≥ 10.83 = P < .001

Table 4

Dependent Variable - Open admissions is a good idea because it equalizes opportunities for higher education.

Independent Variables	Multiple R	Zero-order r	Direction and Significance Level in Final Multiple Regression Equation: Sign	F - Ratio
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions-1967	.25	.25	+	91.91
Attending Midwest U.	.33	-.18	-	59.10
Attending Western U.	.40	-.10	-	40.64
High school grades	.40	-.15	-	6.91
Sex*	.41	.03	+	5.40

*1-male 2-female

Table 5

Dependent Variable - Open admissions is okay, but the students who have high school deficiencies or poor marks should attend separate colleges.

Independent Variables	Multiple R	Zero-order r	Direction and Significance Level in Final Multiple Regression Equation: Sign	F - Ratio
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions-1967	.13	-.13	-	9.65
Attending Central U.	.20	-.14	-	19.39
Being Black	.22	-.12	-	7.62
College GPA	.23	-.08	-	6.05

Table 6

Dependent Variable - Open admissions is a good idea because it offers many students a chance.

Independent Variables	Multiple R	Zero-order r	Direction and Significance Level in Final Multiple Regression Equation: Sign	F - Ratio
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions-1967	.24	.24	+	82.03
Attending Midwest U.	.32	-.18	-	32.10
Attending Western U.	.39	-.11	-	23.30
High school grades	.39	-.14	-	7.80
Attending CUNY-A	.40	.17	+	5.26
Sex	.41	.02	+	4.23

Table 7

Dependent Variable - Open admissions lowers the value of a degree.

Independent Variables	Multiple R	Zero-order r	Direction and Significance Level in Final Multiple Regression Equation: Sign	F - Ratio
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions-1967	.30	-.30	-	79.27
Attending Central U.	.39	-.22	-	49.91
Family Income	.40	.06	+	6.75
Attending CUNY-B	.40	.14	+	4.24
Being Black	.41	-.14	-	4.10

Table 8

Dependent Variable - Open admissions lowers the reputation of a college.

Independent Variables	Multiple R	Zero-order r	Direction and Significance Level in Final Multiple Regression Equation: Sign	F - Ratio
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions-1967	.28	-.28	-	74.98
Attending Central U.	.36	-.20	-	52.83
Attending CUNY-A	.37	.01	-	9.02
Being Black	.38	-.10	-	5.10
Sex	.39	-.14	-	4.85

Table 9

Dependent Variable - Open admissions discourages applications from outstanding high school graduates.

Independent Variables	Multiple R	Zero-order r	Direction and Significance Level in Final Multiple Regression Equation: Sign	F- Ratio
Students from disadvantaged social backgrounds should be given preferential treatment in college admissions-1967	.23	-.28	-	50.06
Attending Central U.	.27	-.12	-	18.56